

**COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO  
STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS, SPRING 2010  
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS:  
NOEL-LEVITZ & CSM'S STUDENT CAMPUS CLIMATE & SATISFACTION SURVEY**

**OVERVIEW**

In May through June 2010, CSM conducted 2 student satisfaction surveys administered online to all students enrolled in Spring 2010 (10,791 email addresses): *CSM Student Campus Climate and Satisfaction Survey (CSM Student Survey)* and the *Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey (Noel-Levitz)*. Overall, the 2 surveys combined received 2,931 responses; of these 2,232 were unique student responses (unduplicated count), a 21% response rate. This is a substantial number of respondents for a higher education setting.

These surveys probed students' satisfaction with campus climate and a spectrum of the student experience and included such areas as:

- Overall impressions and attitudes about CSM;
- Campus safety and security;
- Effectiveness of channels of communication;
- Diversity awareness, overall campus climate, and CSM as a respectful place;
- Satisfaction with facilities;
- Effectiveness of student support programs and services, including the library;  
and
- Effectiveness of instructional programs and offerings

***CSM Student Campus Climate and Satisfaction Survey:***

(1,121 respondents; 10% return from 10,791 email addresses)

Eighty questions were concerned with campus climate and the overall student experience. This survey also contained several questions about campus climate that paralleled the faculty/administrators and classified staff satisfaction surveys, also conducted in Spring 2010. In addition, it contained a section devoted to library usage that had a parallel component in the faculty satisfaction survey.

CSM's Office of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness (PRIE) developed the *CSM Student Survey* after reviewing numerous models of campus climate and satisfaction surveys used at both 2-year and 4-year institutions and several CSM surveys used for accreditation purposes. Question items with similar content were phrased in multiple ways and several items were constructed to parallel question items in the Noel-Levitz.

### **Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey:**

(1,810 respondents, 17% return from 10,791 email addresses)

Nationally-recognized, the Noel-Levitz is a standardized survey instrument that allows for comparison with national norms. More than 100 questions are organized into 12 categories. Benchmark data for comparison are compiled from 178,116 surveys administered at 204 community, junior, and technical colleges, Fall 2007-Spring 2010.

In addition, the Noel-Levitz contained a series of CSM-specific questions that probed the extent to which CSM student made gains in the various institutional-level, General Education Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's) and an item regarding the first-generation college enrollment status of survey participants.

### **METHODS OF ANALYSIS**

Conducted by staff PRIE, this narrative analysis identifies highlights of strengths and challenges for CSM. It does not address all response items. Discussion is organized into themes and includes comparative analysis of the findings from both surveys.

Generally, this analysis discusses data from both surveys in terms of total satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels (e.g. a sum of "agree strongly" and "agree" or "disagree" and "strongly disagree"). For the Noel-Levitz we report solely on satisfaction levels; data for questions related to degrees of "importance" vs. "satisfaction" are factored into comparisons with the national data.

Note: CSM did not use "neutral" as a response option, while the Noel-Levitz does. (Instead CSM uses "Does not Apply.") Consequently, the Noel-Levitz's satisfaction/agreement and dissatisfaction/ disagreement levels are slightly lower than those in the CSM Student Survey.

### **STRENGTHS**

#### **Strengths: Students' Positive Overall Experience at CSM**

Overall, students expressed very high levels of satisfaction with CSM in both the CSM Student Survey and the Noel-Levitz. These high levels of satisfaction are reflected in a variety of question items that probed at overall campus climate and the extent to which students feel valued, welcomed, and a sense of campus pride.

In the CSM Student Survey, 92% indicated that they "were proud to be a CSM student."

When asked if they would chose to attend CSM (if starting over), 91% said yes and 96% would recommend CSM to a family member or friend. When asked to rate their overall

"educational experience," 91% had a positive response (44% rated their overall experience as "excellent"; and 47% rated it "good"),

The Noel-Levitz corroborated this view: among the ten top ranked question items (of nearly 100 items), was "overall satisfaction" with CSM, including an item about CSM's "reputation with the community." When asked whether students would enroll again in CSM, 89% had a positive response while 57% said the experience was better than they had expected. In total, 91% indicated that CSM was better than or "about" what they expected.

### **Strengths: Students Feel Welcomed & Respected**

Generally students feel "respected" at CSM—a theme that emerges in both surveys. In the CSM *Student Survey*, the Section, "CSM as a Respectful Place," asks students to rank how CSM "respects" students according to 11 distinct delimiters (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age groups, etc.). In all categories students showed 90% or higher levels of satisfaction—very high ratings.

When students were asked about their "Impressions of CSM," this positive theme is further reflected in their ranking of adjectival descriptors. The 5 highest ranked descriptors (95% to 98%) indicate a sense of CSM as a tolerant, welcoming place. These words and phrases include: "Tolerant of Diversity," "Friendly," "Welcoming," "Respectful," and "Safe." In addition, when asked explicitly whether they "like the CSM campus and feel comfortable," 93% expressed agreement.

The responses to the Noel-Levitz demonstrate similar attitudes: feeling "welcome on campus" was ranked among the top 15 (83%). In fact, students report satisfaction levels above the national average when asked whether campus staff are "caring and helpful" and whether being a student is an "enjoyable" experience.

The theme of CSM as welcoming place is also reflected in those Noel-Levitz items specifically categorized in the national comparative data as "Service Excellence." CSM has ratings above the national norm for the item that asks whether students "seldom receive the run-around when asking for help."

### **Strengths: Responsiveness to Diversity**

One of the areas in which CSM demonstrates highly ranked, positive responses is in the area of diversity. In the CSM *Student Survey* 's Section, "Impressions of CSM," the phrase "Tolerant of Diversity" received the highest rating (98%). In the Section, "My CSM Experience," the top 2 ranked items (97-98%) explicitly address diversity. In fact, in nearly all questions concerned with diversity, including the entire Section, "CSM as a Respectful Place," the vast majority of students report pride in CSM and a sense that their unique attributes are respected.

Responsiveness to diversity also includes the issue of whether a free exchange of ideas is tolerated and encouraged on campus. In the *CSM Student Survey*, students report very high levels of satisfaction with items concerned with the free exchange of ideas. Students indicate that CSM “values students’ opinions” (92%) and encourages the “open discussion of controversial topics”(91%). In addition students perceive that faculty encourage students to “examine different points of view”(89%).

While the *Noel-Levitz* does not pose items explicitly about the exchange of ideas, it does reflect consistently positive responses to issues related diversity. In the *Noel-Levitz* comparative study of national norms, 6 items are categorized as “Total Responsiveness to Diverse Population.” Here students’ levels of satisfaction were above the national average for 5 of the 6 question items explicitly related to diversity. The 6th item, concerned with CSM’s “commitment to commuters,” ranked comparable to the national average.

### ***Strengths: Instructional Effectiveness (Faculty & Programs)***

Students generally report high levels of satisfaction with their faculty and instructional programs. In the *CSM Student Survey*, 94% indicate that they have learned a great deal from their courses and that grading practices are fair (92%). When asked about their experiences with faculty, 93% indicate that most instructors are “genuinely interested in teaching and their students” and that they feel “comfortable” approaching an instructor to ask questions. In addition, 88% indicate that the “overall quality of teaching is excellent” and that “most faculty carefully prepare” for classes.

The *Noel-Levitz* generally corroborated these attitudes. When asked about opportunities for “intellectual growth, ” students indicated satisfaction levels that were above the national average. Program requirements are seen to be “clear and reasonable”—a perception also ranked above the norm. In other areas of instructional effectiveness, items concerned with faculty expertise, consideration of student differences, treatment of individuals, and understanding of students’ unique life experiences were also ranked above the national average. Other items concerned with faculty were at the national average.

### ***Strengths: Campus Services***

In the *CSM Student Survey*, students also report other specific areas in which the campus staff members are perceived as helpful or knowledgeable. Personnel in “support services” (89%) and admissions and registration (88%) are reported as “informed and helpful.”

The *Noel-Levitz* reflects similar perceptions. Ratings also above the norm include questions related to the helpfulness and approachability of library and bookstore staff.

They also include perceptions that financial aide counselors and Veteran's Services staff are helpful, admissions staff members are knowledgeable, and recruitment counselors accurately portray the campus. In addition, satisfaction with new student orientation services is ranked above the national average.

### **Strengths: Communicating Information & Processes**

In a variety of ways, CSM appears to communicate effectively some types of information. In the CSM *Student Survey*, 95% felt they received useful information from the schedule and catalog and 90% found useful information on the website.

In the CSM *Student Survey* students are also clearly quite informed about the consequences of unethical behavior (95%); in a related question, 94% indicate that the college and faculty give clear information about what constitutes cheating. In addition, 82% were satisfied with the idea that there is a "clear sense of appropriate and inappropriate behavior on campus." (However, this latter item was also among the 15 lowest ranked items.)

In the Noel-Levitz items ranked above the norm related to policies or procedures in admissions and registration, making class (add/drop) changes, and paying school bills.

### **Strengths: Safety and Facilities**

Students feel safe at CSM (94%); in fact the word "safe" was ranked fifth (96%) for words or phrases used to describe CSM. In the Noel-Levitz, the notion that the campus is "safe and secure" ranked above the norm as well. Items concerned with the quick response of security staff in emergencies and the security of parking lots were also above the national average. (However, an item concerned with the "helpfulness" of security staff ranked below the national norm.)

In the CSM *Student Survey* one of the top ranked items (92%) was concerned with classrooms as "clean, neat, and conducive to learning." The several areas in the Noel-Levitz explicitly concerned with facilities had ratings above the national average as well. They include: the availability of child care facilities on campus; the amount of parking spaces; adequate and accessible computer labs; and up to date equipment in Lab facilities.

## **CHALLENGES & THEMES TO INVESTIGATE**

In general, CSM students indicate very high levels of satisfaction with CSM in both surveys. In fact in the CSM *Survey*, the lowest ranked item for satisfaction (60%) still indicates *that a majority were satisfied in that area*. And in the Noel-Levitz the vast majority of responses ranked equal to or above the national norm—with only fractional differences in percentages between items.

This section is intended to identify themes in those items ranked either among the bottom 15 (or 25) in CSM *Student Survey* or were below the national average in the Noel-Levitz. In many cases the “challenges” or themes suggested here are subtle issues. These themes may suggest areas to be further explored in future surveys, in-depth focus groups, or disaggregated analyses of the data.

**Possible Challenge: Aspects of Campus Climate & Diversity**

In the CSM *Student Survey* one question item was concerned with sexual harassment: “I think sexual harassment is a problem at CSM.” While 84% did not think it a problem, 16% agreed with the statement. Despite the overall positive response, 144 individuals indicated dissatisfaction—perhaps suggesting an issue that might be probed further. When asked if CSM “handles complaints of sexual harassment fairly,” 88% agreed and 12% disagreed. The latter group includes 75 individuals.

In addition, when asked whether students perceive ethnic or racial “tensions in the classroom,” a small number, 168 (17%) reported agreement. (Conversely, 83% disagreed.)

**Possible Challenge: “Being Welcomed” vs. “Belonging”**

As noted above, students feel genuinely welcomed by the faculty staff they encounter and by the “friendly” campus as a whole. However, there are suggestions that some students don’t feel a strong sense of “belonging” to the campus or a sense that there is concern about the student as an individual. In the CSM *Student Survey* where students were asked to describe CSM through a word or phrase, the lowest ranked item was “concern about me as an individual.” In the section, “My CSM Experience,” among the 15 lowest ranked items were items concerned with a student feeling “valued as an individual on campus” and that “CSM is genuinely concerned about me as an individual.” In fact, 26% (239 students) report feeling “isolated within the CSM community...because of my background.”

These themes are corroborated in the Noel-Levitz. Items ranked below the national average include the statements about whether students know “what’s happening on campus” and whether they think “most students feel a sense of belonging on campus.”

A lack of a sense of “belonging” is surely connected to the fact that CSM is a commuter campus. In the Noel-Levitz section, “Total Responsiveness to Diverse Populations,” the only item ranked below the national average was the “institution’s commitment to commuters.” Indeed, when asked whether they “generally know what’s happening on campus,” this item also ranked below the national average.



**Possible Challenge: CSM's Identity**

It should be noted that in the Section, "Impressions of CSM," the 5 items ranked lowest in agreement levels included phrases used to describe CSM as "Intellectually Challenging," "Up-to-Date," "Academically Rigorous," and "Cutting Edge." (At the same time the vast majority agreed with these statements.) This ranking perhaps suggests that some students may be concerned with CSM's credibility as a contemporary academic institution. In addition, among the 10 lowest ranked items in the Section, "My CSM Experience," was the statement that "students know how to behave in the classroom."

**Possible Challenge: Channels for Complaints**

Issues related to difficulties students experience as they negotiate college processes are also suggested in the CSM Student Survey. In the Section, "My CSM Experience," students were asked whether they know where to get help for a class in which they are having problems or for a complaint about a faculty or staff member. These were among the 10 lowest ranking items for satisfaction, 78% and 60% respectively.

A concern with how CSM handles complaints is also suggested in the Noel-Levitz: the item regarding the availability of "channels for expressing student complaints" was ranked below the national average. This is consistent with the item discussed above in which some students feel they do not know what's happening on campus.

**Possible Challenge: Instructional Effectiveness & the Availability of Classes**

In both surveys some students indicate that they are not completely satisfied with the availability of classes. In the CSM Student Survey, while a majority (76%) indicated they were able to get classes "most of the time," this item ranked among the bottom 10% for item ranking. When asked in the Noel-Levitz whether a "good variety of classes" are offered on campus and whether classes are scheduled at "convenient times," students' responses ranked below the national average. In addition, their satisfaction levels with the availability of tutoring were below the national average.

Perhaps at a time in which CSM had been compelled to trim its course offerings and does not yet offer a comprehensive, centralized learning and tutoring center, such findings are no surprise.

**Possible Challenges: Campus Support Services & Advising**

Students have very positive responses to many student services. As noted above, personnel in student support services (89%) and admissions and records are perceived as "informed and helpful" (89%, 88%). Positive responses were also reflected in the Noel-Levitz—satisfaction rates above the national average were reported for the statements concerning "caring and helpful" campus staff, "knowledgeable" admissions staff, and "helpful" financial aid counselors.

However, in the Noel-Levitz responses to academic advising were mixed. Questions about whether the student's academic advisor helped the student set goals or whether advisors were knowledgeable about transfer indeed ranked above the national average. An academic advisor's concern for the student's "success as an individual" was ranked comparable to the national average. Items concerned with whether the student's academic advisor is "approachable" and is "knowledgeable about program requirements" ranked below the national average.

Note: There were no question items explicitly related to academic advising in the CSM Student Survey.

**The Noel-Levitz question-items that ranked below the national average include the following statements:**

1. Most students feel a sense of belonging here.
69. There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.
4. Security staff are helpful.
6. My academic advisor is approachable.
32. My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.
7. Adequate financial aid is available for most students.
50. Tutoring services are readily available.
8. Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient for me.
44. I generally know what's happening on campus.
67. Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available.

**DIFFERENTIALS: ETHNICITY AND AGE**

***Ethnicity***

PRIE has disaggregated student responses from both surveys according to both age and ethnicity demographics and published the data in multiple reports. The CSM Student Survey used 9 ethnicity categories, including "multi-racial," while the Noel-Levitz used 7. PRIE cautions that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about demographic populations where there are 20 or fewer respondents to some question items; this was the case for several responses from Native Americans and Pacific Islanders in the CSM Student Survey.

In general there were not significant differences in levels of satisfaction among the groups, though there are differences. Generally, African Americans indicate levels of satisfaction that are consistently the highest.

***Age***



The CSM *Student Survey* has 7 age categories, while the Noel-Levitz has 5. It is in this area where one sees significant differences among age cohorts. The older the students, generally, the higher the levels of satisfaction.

The youngest cohort is historically the most at risk at CSM. This is the cohort described as 19 or younger in the CSM *Student Survey* and 18 or younger in the Noel-Levitz. They have the lowest success rates and highest drop-out rates. For many question items, their level of satisfaction is significantly lower than the respondent population as a whole and they appear consistently more disaffected in both surveys. For example in the CSM *Student Survey*, when asked to rate the friendliness of personal interactions with faculty, 69% of the youngest group indicated satisfaction vs. 84% for the population as whole.

Yet even this group views CSM as friendly (98%), welcoming (97%), and tolerant of diversity (99%). Not surprisingly, in the area of technology, they are more satisfied than the population as a whole. When asked if the website is easy to navigate, for example, 92% indicated satisfaction vs. 87% for the population as a whole.

### **PROFILE OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS**

Student respondents who participated in the 2 surveys have similar demographic characteristics: they are predominately female, older, and more likely to be fulltime students than the general population in Spring 2010. Their ethnicity, however, reflected that of the general student population.

Data regarding survey respondents are compared below to that of the general population in Spring 2010.

#### **Noel-Levitz Students**

- Respondents were far more likely to be full-time students (48.4% vs. 29.4%)
- Respondents were somewhat older (43% 35 years and above vs. 26%)
- Females were more likely to respond (60% vs. 51%)
- The ethnicity of respondents closely mirrored the general student population:
  - White (36% vs. 37%)
  - African American (3% vs. 3%)
  - Asian (31% vs. 24%)
  - Hispanic (15% vs. 19%)

### **CSM Student Survey Students**

- Respondents were far more likely to be full-time students (35.8% vs. 29.4%)
- Respondents were somewhat older (43% 35 years and above vs. 26%) identical to the Noel-Levitz students
- Females were more likely to respond (61% vs. 51%)
- The ethnicity of respondents also closely mirrored the general student population:
  - White (36% vs. 37%)
  - African American (2.3% vs. 3.4%)
  - Asian (30% vs. 24%)
  - Hispanic (15% vs. 19%)